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Uses of civilising claims: Three moments in British theatre history

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Abstract

During the last ten years British cultural policy has seen a remarkable rise in the discourse of culture's civilising and governing powers, which are commonly called the 'social impacts' of culture. Existing analyses present two contrasting views that see this phenomenon as (a) the instrumentalisation of culture or (b) an example of culture's inherent governmentality. This article attempts to suggest an alternative analytical framework by pointing out historical intersections between the claims of culture's civilising function and the development of cultural field in Bourdieu's sense. For this purpose, the use of civilising claims at three moments in the British theatre history is investigated and the following is discussed. First, the claims' implementation tended to be shaped primarily by professional and artistic intentions such as the pursuit of social respectability, aesthetic excellence and autonomy. Second, as powerful rhetoric, the claims justified new institutional arrangements, which led to the establishment of the theatre as non-commercial, subsidised and exclusive high art. It is concluded that the analysis of contemporary cultural policy should consider such historical consequences of culture's civilising claims, which now set an important context where the policy is perceived and implemented.

1. Introduction

During the last ten years Britain has witnessed a manifest rise in claims of culture's 'shaping', 'civilising' or 'transforming' effects (Belfiore and O. Bennett, 2007). This has been triggered primarily by government's (a Labour government since 1997) unprecedented emphasis on the so-called 'social impacts' of culture¹: e.g., culture's role in preventing and alleviating social problems and in facilitating social cohesion. Since it

¹ In this article, the terms 'culture' and 'arts' are used interchangeably. The definition of culture in the cultural policy sense has widened in recent decades to include commercial cultural activities and, to some degree, symbolic elements of everyday life. However, when it comes to the issue of culture's social impacts, the government's focus is still placed on non-profit, subsidised (high) arts.

was created in 1997 to replace the Department of National Heritage, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has promoted the direct role of culture in addressing social concerns and has begun to request cultural organisations to act as ‘vehicles for positive social change’, primarily by expanding outreach and education programmes (DCMS, 2000: 9). In a similar vein, the Arts Council England’s justification of public arts subsidy has come to depend more on the transformative power of the arts and their capacity to tackle social exclusion, youth offending, ill health and unemployment, than on values derived from the pursuit of aesthetic excellence and quality (ACE, 2003).

On the basis of the current recasting of the language of cultural policy in Britain, there exists an increasingly accepted argument among policy-makers that culture can effectively induce positive changes in both individuals and communities by equipping them with desirable values, attitudes and dispositions which are essential to sustain and develop society. Although such a belief has informed the discussion of culture and cultural policy in Britain since the nineteenth century (Arnold, 1993; O. Bennett, 1994; T. Bennett, 1998, Bozello, 1987), the current amplification of the civilising claim is astounding.

The new surge of civilising discourse appears to attract two different strands of responses from cultural policy researchers. First, there is a view that the escalating stress on culture’s shaping power indicates the ‘instrumentalisation’ of culture and the consequent erosion of its autonomy (e.g., Belfiore, 2002; Gray, 2007; Mirza, 2006). This is likely to accompany a normative argument that culture should be protected and publicly subsidised because of its ‘intrinsic’ – aesthetic or communicative – values rather than social functions. Meanwhile, the second response is that culture has inherently been ‘governmental’ and the contemporary cultural policy is another example of cultural governance (T. Bennett, 1998, 2001; Lloyd and Thomas, 1998). This thought

is based on the theory of liberal governance (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991) which holds that in a liberal society people are governed at a distance through liberal mechanisms; that is, they are given freedom and assistance so that they can direct and regulate their own conduct. Alongside various knowledge, discourses, programmes and procedures, the argument goes, the use of physical space and the practices of cultural organisations constitute an essential part of the governing process. For example, T. Bennett (1995, 1998) argues that, behind the birth of the public museum in Britain, there was a clear intention of civilising the populace and solving social problems through culture. According to him, culture has hardly been separated from the issue of social management as the governing function is its very essence.

The above two theories provide contrasting views of culture – that is, culture as an autonomous field *vs.* culture as a part of a governing mechanism – advancing two different understandings of contemporary cultural policy in Britain. Despite their incompatible theoretical underpinnings, nonetheless, they are common in identifying the prevalence of the discourse of culture's civilising power with the subordination of culture to social or governing purposes. However, this article opposes such a view, suggesting that there could be a detachment between the discourse and the reality which is constituted by intentional and non-intentional behaviours of various actors in the cultural field. It is because the actors produce, reproduce and consume the discourse often strategically as much as they are regulated and affected by it (Scott, 2001). The existing sociological findings that the rationality of the cultural field is grounded on the actors' orientation towards art for art's sake, artistic autonomy and symbolic consecration (Bourdieu, 1993) also encourage one to challenge the above two perspectives and to interrogate the extent to which cultural policy's civilising claims are reshaping the sector and how subsidised cultural organisations are responding to the

shifting policy climate. However, empirical research on this scarcely exists in spite of the abundant critiques of the policy itself.

For the time being, one way to comprehend the nature of the civilising claims of contemporary cultural policy in Britain might be to revisit similar claims in recent history and to explore their contexts and consequences. It is because history is not only the mirror where one can find interesting parallels with a contemporary issue but also the ‘path’ that informs the ways in which the issue is perceived and addressed. Looking into three moments of the history of British theatre, this article finds that the civilising claims of culture were used in various circumstances but were not always translated into direct actions. The primary goals of the claims’ advocates were likely to be decoupled from the concerns with widening culture’s accessibility to the public, which might be a precondition for its governmental or instrumental use. Instead of culture serving governing goals, this article argues, the claims for the latter eventually contributed towards the cultural sector’s gaining of symbolic and financial resources – i.e., social respectability and state subsidy – and venturing into non-profit operation, which was essential for the sector to secure autonomy from both the market and the state. However, investigating British theatre history itself is not the main aim of this article. Rather, relying on existing research on theatre history and cultural policy, it focuses on the ‘uses’ of civilising claims at the following three junctures: commercial management after the mid-nineteenth century, the repertory movement in the early twentieth century and, finally, the creation of the state arts funding system in the mid-twentieth century. These periods were chosen because they constitute key phases in the development of the theatre that one may now take for granted – the theatre as a serious, non-commercial, subsidised and elite art form (or such a venue)² – and they also saw the active

² For this reason, the discussion does not include other important moments in British theatre history, e.g., alternative theatre movements such as the worker’s theatre movement in the 1920s and 1930s and

employment of civilising claims. By shedding light on the complexity and dynamics in the claims' uses, this article attempts to provide theoretical implications for the analysis of the contemporary cultural policy in Britain.

2. Commercial theatre management in the nineteenth century

In Britain, the perception that the theatre is educational, civilising and uplifting was an invention of the nineteenth century. The theatre had existed for a long time as a venue for public amusement, which was often seen as quite political, and was generally held in low esteem. This was demonstrated by a proliferation of legislation devised to control actors and acts of performance.³ Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, the theatre was still held in low esteem and was a subject of notorious scandals such as prostitution. Nonetheless, the theatre served well as a popular amusement for workingmen. Its emphasis was on mixed programmes, in which drama took its place alongside several different sorts of activities, such as dioramas, music, ballet, acrobatics and animal shows, for an evening. The shows lasted for four or five hours until midnight, and half price was applied after nine o'clock (Booth et al., 1975: 9). The audience could eat and drink although the Theatre Regulation Act (1843) prevented the supply of refreshment in the auditorium and also could exercise the 'right' to show their pleasure and displeasure by shouting, hissing or throwing disposable items.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of the theatre's civilising and moral missions was ardently promoted. It was gradually accepted by society and consequently the theatre's status began to be elevated to that of a reforming

political and community theatres in the 1960s and 1970s, which emphasised direct political and social roles of the theatre.

³ Throughout the Tudor period, members of theatre companies, except those under patronage, were generally regarded as being punishable ranks of rogues and vagabonds (Trussler, 2000: 68-69). In the Commonwealth from 1642 to 1660, the Puritans declared all theatres illegal as a source of low morality. Later, legitimate drama (comedy and tragedy) was permitted to be performed in only two London theatres, Covent Garden and the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which held Royal Patents.

agency and the home of an art. However, it is debatable whether the theatre performed its civilising roles as successfully as the claims suggested. What is clearer is that the claims made a crucial contribution to the legitimisation of the theatre as an art, which was potentially exclusive to the educated and middle classes.

The theatre's powerful civilising claims should be understood in the broader context where social reform and the enlightenment of the mass public were seriously discussed and relevant instruments for this purpose were sought. As Borzello (1987: 5) notes, this period saw the arts, as a way to civilise, being added to all the other solutions to deal with the problem of the poor. In particular, public libraries, museums and galleries were strongly presented as serving the primary goal of the moral uplift and refinement of the mass population, who were characterised by social reformers as suffering from prevailing evils such as drunkenness, ill health, an insanitary environment and an undisciplined life (T. Bennett, 1995, 1998, 2001; Lloyd and Thomas, 1998; Minihan, 1977). It was widely believed that attending a museum would encourage the public to internalise particular civilised habits, tastes and dispositions that were essential for forming self-disciplined citizens. Theatre professionals followed the same line and began to project the theatre not only as a decorous amusement that could substitute for heavy drinking, physical indulgence, obscene conversation and the degradation provided by a gin palace or a pot-house (Irving, 1994) but also as 'a powerful and popular school for the inculcation of virtue and the diffusion of every great and noble sentiment' (Neville, 1875: 89). For instance, Henry Irving, the most influential actor-manager of the time and a leading advocate of the moral power of the theatre, argued that the theatre could develop dramatic sentiment, which was righteous and religious, and would show the public a human character that was trained and perfected. In a conference of the Church of England Temperance Society in 1876, he

recommended the clergy to use the influence of theatre for purification and moral uplift rather than suppressing or banning it:

Gentlemen, change your attitude towards the stage, and, believe me, the stage will co-operate with your work of faith and labour of love. It will help you in disarming and decimating the forces which make for moral evil, and in implanting and fostering the seeds and energies of moral good. (Irving, 1994: 166)

Meanwhile, the introduction of new and challenging dramas of modern life by continental writers and occasional visits by theatre companies from the continent also boosted the theatre's educational claims. For example, the Comédie Française, which visited London in 1879, inspired Matthew Arnold, the poet, literary critic and school inspector, to write an essay 'The French play in London' published in *The Nineteenth Century* (August 1879). He was not only impressed by the quality of the company's performance but also saw the potential of theatre as a civilising force on society. This led him to argue for state subsidy that seemed essential for a theatre to devote itself to artistic and civilising missions.

Importantly, civilising claims in this period accompanied theatre managers' various actions to modernise their theatres to demonstrate moral efficacy. Michael Booth's research shows the transformation in great detail while John Pick's work focuses on the strategies of West End theatre managers in particular (Booth et al., 1975, 1991; Pick, 1983). According to their research, the changes encompassed almost every aspect of the theatre from programming policy to the interior of the building. Notably, mixed bills were replaced by single dramas. Shakespearean productions became more elaborate and contemporary plays, which were often based upon upper-/middle-class settings, gained popularity. According to Booth (1991: 23-24) and Foulkes (1997),

clergymen now became central figures in some dramas that protested the virtue of the Christian faith. Such changes coincided with redecoration of the theatre building and introduction of new norms and conventions: the removal of food; dress restrictions and advanced booking systems; theatre advertisements in the serious papers; matinee performances; uniformed house staff; and carpeted aisles. To prevent disorder in the auditorium, theatre managers commonly hired policemen and detectives (House of Commons Select Committee, 1866, 1892), and it began to be reported that audiences now sat in an orderly fashion (Booth et al., 1975: 13).⁴ Theatre manager's efforts were received warmly by the middle and educated classes. The transformation of the theatre was well illustrated in a letter contributed by Matthew Arnold to the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1882:

It [Princess's Theatre] was another world from the old Princess's of my remembrance. The theatre itself was renewed and transformed...it had become decorated and brilliant. But the real revival was...in the presence of the public. The public was there; not alone the old, peculiar public of the pit and gallery, but with a certain number of the rich and refined in the boxes and stalls, and with whole, solid classes of English society conspicuous by their absence. (Arnold, 1919: 24-25)

This period also saw the expansion of theatre criticism in newspapers and periodicals and the emergence of a new generation of theatre critics who campaigned for intellectual and serious drama, in particular Ibsen's plays (Archer, 1886: 2-6; Richards, 2005: 293-295). This was accompanied by the improvement of the social status of the theatrical professions epitomised by the fact that public school and university men

⁴ However, one should take into account that, as Davis and Emeljanow (2001) point out, the refinement of audience behaviour tended to be reported by observers who had different intentions and vested interests, and this often tends to lead to contradictory accounts.

entered the profession and after the 1890s knighthoods began to be given to respectable actors and managers (Hunt et al., 1978: 69; Richards, 2005: chap. 4).

However, it should be noted that the theatres' enthusiastic use of the civilising discourse was deeply related to its exclusiveness and commercialism (Hunt et al., 1978). The theatres were more concerned with gaining respectability in the eyes of wealthy customers than taking concrete measures to appeal to the problematic portion of the population. The newly introduced norms such as advanced booking, dress code and single performance bills were successful in terms of bringing in larger audiences from the wealthy and educated classes but they did not work in a friendly manner for the poorer members of society (Pick, 1983). The increased exclusivity was aptly illustrated by the physical transformation of the auditorium structure. From the 1850s British theatres began to replace the pit with stall seats and upgrade the former first gallery to the dress circle so that more members of the affluent classes could attend. A famous instance was when the Bancrofts, then a leading West End theatre management, took the Haymarket in 1880 and replaced the pit with stall seats (Booth, 1991: 63). This strategy was generally successful as theatre visits began to be regarded as an important part of middle-class life (Gunn, 2005: 52, 54; Pick, 1983). The public showed their anger at the alteration of theatre auditoria by noisy demonstrations but the tide of change could not be turned.

It appears that such a transformation of the theatre resulted in a change in audience composition rather than a reformation of their conduct. Although the composition depended on the particular conditions of the theatre, such as its neighbourhood, performance and management (Davis and Emeljanow, 2001; Richards, 2005), it is safe to say that at least theatres in the West End began to rely more on middle class audiences (Davis and Emeljanow, 2001: chap. 6; Pick, 1983; Trussler,

2000: 260). Given the increasing popularity of music halls during that time and their fierce competition with theatres, it could be concluded that large audiences – particularly those from the lower classes – were drawn to the halls which offered a series of diverse entertainments at a cheaper price and in a more permissive atmosphere where drinking, smoking and chatting were allowed (Bailey, 1978, 1982; Booth et al., 1975: 20-21; 1991: 11-12; Höher, 1986). Civilising and educational claims of the stage were continually and strategically used by theatre managers who defended their monopoly over staging plays and condemned music halls as degrading dramatic art (House of Commons Select Committee, 1866, 1892).

Undeniably, civilising discourse was an integral part of theatre management in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, the actual corollary of its use appears complicated. It is because the claims were produced and consumed within a complex environment where the politics of social reform, struggles of theatre practitioners to counter anti-theatrical prejudice and cultural distinction of classes were interwoven. There was a serious limit in directly translating the civilising mission into theatre management practice but the discourse itself was effective insofar as it successfully helped theatre professionals to refine the stage and to achieve social respectability.

4. The repertory movement

The early twentieth century was another important juncture for the civilising discourse of the theatre. This time its use was closely linked to combating commercialism in the industry and establishing a new mode of theatre organisation. As discussed above, the theatre had begun to be regarded as a 'temple of art' and a theatre visit as a marker of class distinction by the end of the previous century. However, it was still a commercial

business and mostly operated in profit, particularly in London (Rowell and Jackson, 1984). One strategy to maximise income was to present popular products on a long run, which became the norm in the West End from the 1850s (Booth, 1991: 13). This was driven by actor-managers who themselves enjoyed the status of stars and exerted control over the overall process of theatre production and management (Hunt et al., 1978). Thanks to the development of the railway, London-based managements organised touring of West End hits or popular repertoires, which resulted in the demise of locally based touring companies (Booth, 1991: 19).

The repertory movement originated to challenge the profit-oriented theatre management (Chisholm, 1934; Goldie, 1935, chap. 1; Howe, 1910; Kemp, 1943; Matthews, 1924; Rowell and Jackson, 1984). Impressed by modern dramas from the continent, stimulated by new British dramatists and worried by excessive commercialism in the industry, the pioneers of the movement demanded the setting up of a new type of theatre: a theatre which would oppose the long run system and present its plays in alternation, building a number of productions over time and making each production ready to be staged on a short run.⁵ Their justification of the repertory system was firmly grounded on the role of the theatre not only as a serious art form but also, like public libraries, as a ‘public utility’ and ‘institutionalised education’ (Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 31). It was only by adopting the non-commercial repertory system and producing intelligent plays that the theatre could fulfil such roles, the pioneers claimed. For example in his article ‘Municipal Theatres’ (1896) George Bernard Shaw, the influential playwright and an ardent supporter of the repertory idea, criticised ‘private theatrical enterprise’ for being ‘immoral, irresponsible, full of the gambling spirit’ and

⁵ Originally it was suggested that the repertory theatre should stage a number of plays in alternation so that three, four or five different plays could be performed in the course of a week. Although such a rigorous approach was experimented with in the early years, most repertory theatres were actually ‘short’ run theatres in which plays were given for a consecutive run of a week or more (Goldie, 1935: 9-10; Rowell and Jackson, 1984: 1).

sacrificing public welfare to commercial speculation (1948: 73-79). This was followed by the suggestion that if a city or town had already built up public libraries, baths and museums and picture galleries then it should have subsidised theatres. Similarly, supporters of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre frequently insisted that the theatre could serve as an effective ‘educational instrument’ and even identified it with the ‘cathedral’ (Goldie, 1935: 24, 37).

The first repertory experiment took place at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1904 and was an artistic and financial success. Subsequently, major cities saw the inception of repertory theatres under the patronage of wealthy individuals (e.g., Manchester and Birmingham) or support from leading members of the community through public subscription (e.g., Glasgow and Liverpool). In order to serve an art instead of making the art serve a commercial purpose, the theatres developed a new organising mode, which might look familiar to today’s audiences: they tried to maintain a permanent resident company, though financial restraints led them to hire actors on a seasonal basis; the play itself, rather than star actors, received most emphasis; the producer or director replaced the actor-manager; and greater attention was given to rehearsals and training of actors, through which the general standard of production could be improved (Chisholm, 1934: 35). By the end of the 1930s, a national pattern of repertory theatres had emerged: in July 1934 there were nineteen building-based repertory theatres, fifteen repertory theatres that did not have resident companies and fourteen amateur repertory companies (Chisholm, 1934: 245-246)

Meanwhile it is difficult to know how much the repertory theatre appealed to members of the general public and yielded educational and spiritual effects. While Bache Matthews, Birmingham Repertory Theatre’s Assistant Director, said that their core audiences of 500-1,000 were drawn from various classes, Grace Goldie, historian

of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, admitted that supporting repertory theatre was a fashion among wealthy people (Goldie, 1935: 35, 65; Matthews, 1924: chap. 5). Their common approach to audience development was to nurture knowledgeable enthusiasts by engaging them with lectures, workshops and a supporters' group ('friends') rather than deliberately reaching out to those who were 'less educated and civilised'. The theatres aspired to continue offering high-quality drama so that the tastes of audiences could gradually improve and the habit of theatre-going could become strengthened, and this venture was successful in terms of attracting intellectual theatre-goers and building loyal audiences.

This period also witnessed the discourse of the civilising mission of the theatre being used avidly by supporters of the idea of subsidised theatres such as a National Theatre, (Drinkwater, 1930; Granville-Barker and Archer, 1907; Shaw, 1948; Whitworth, 1951). In spite of a common doubt about government's direct involvement,⁶ the lack of public donations and subscriptions made the campaigners for National Theatre projects positively consider the idea of state aid. For instance, the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Committee tested the idea at the House of Commons in 1913. Although it could not obtain enough support from MPs, there was vigorous discussion on the educational and civilising power of the theatre ('Without State support you cannot encourage modern dramatists, and therefore you cannot educate the public taste properly....nobody's education is complete without the arts', Arthur Ponsonby, MP, cited in Whitworth, 1951: 112). Similarly, the British Drama League proposed state subsidy for a National Theatre and later a chain of subsidised repertory theatres,

⁶ It should be noted that there had been different ideas of a 'National Theatre'. While some commentators such as Matthew Arnold (1879) saw it as a state subsidised venture, others emphasised that the theatre should be independent and also sought effective ways of financing the theatre from private sources such as a national subscription, public subscriptions, donations based on 'private liberality' or support from municipalities (e.g., Granville-Barker and Archer, 1907). In this case, the notion of 'national' was closer to 'exemplary' or 'of national importance' rather than government subsidy.

which ‘would within a generation effect an improvement in the social, intellectual, and moral tone of the country beyond our reckoning’ by providing ‘education of the most liberal, profound, and exciting kind’ (Drinkwater, 1930: 13-14). However, these suggestions were never realised because a majority of politicians and theatre professionals did not see the theatre’s civilising nature necessarily giving grounds for state subsidy and there still existed a strong suspicion about state intervention.

Overall, the British theatre industry at that time was still dominated by commercial managements. A large number of commercial repertory theatres emerged, producing popular and safe programmes at low prices on a weekly basis, with low budgets and minimum rehearsals, and serious repertory ventures also often performed well at the box office (Rowell and Jackson, 1984). Nonetheless, the implication of the repertory movement was significant in that it proposed an alternative institutional arrangement of the theatre organisation. The educational and civilising nature of the theatre was consistently argued as a powerful validation for the new system. As seen from a remark made by Ramsay Muir, professor of modern history at Liverpool University and board member of the Liverpool Repertory Theatre, repertory theatre was projected as the ‘salvation’ of not only the drama but also ‘England’ (cited in Goldie 1935: 22). Meanwhile, the conceptual alliance between the proposed civilising nature of the non-commercial theatre and state funding was yet to be forged.

5. State arts subsidy

During and after the Second World War was a critical moment for the genealogy of the civilising claims of the theatre if not the arts in general: these claims served as a powerful rationale for state intervention in the arts and the inauguration of public arts subsidy. This started with the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts

[CEMA], a wartime measure set up in 1940 to encourage people's morale through arts activities. Initially CEMA aimed at encouraging amateur arts activities and at assisting unemployed artists but it soon moved its emphasis to supporting the professional arts. As to the theatre, CEMA came to concentrate its resources on supporting the Old Vic and its two touring groups, and later on rescuing the Theatre Royal, Bristol (Leventhal, 1990). After the war, the government decided to continue its financial support for the arts by establishing the Arts Council of Great Britain. This was partly due to the popularity of the work done by CEMA and the increased demand for public funding from the arts sector, which suffered from damage caused by the war. It also reflected the expansion of the state's role after the war to many areas, including the arts, which had previously been taken care of by individuals and private organisations. This period also witnessed local councils bestowing discretionary power under the Local Government Act of 1948 to spend money on the arts and entertainments (Witts, 1998: 201).

State arts subsidy was justified not only by the civilising benefits entailed in the arts but also by the need for their equal diffusion among members of the public. This belief was clearly demonstrated in a radio lecture by John Maynard Keynes, the economist, who became the first Chairman of the Arts Council:

We look forward to the time when the theatre and the concert-hall and the gallery will be a living element in everyone's upbringing, and regular attendance at the theatre and at concerts a part of organised education. (Keynes, 1945)

For the same reason, the necessity of a National Theatre was debated at Parliament in 1949 and this resulted in the passage of the National Theatre Bill, which demonstrated a growing consensus among politicians that the theatre would 'make a real contribution towards the ideal of people's civilisation' (Lord Jowitt, the Lord Chancellor cited in

Shepherd and Womack, 1996: 307-308). Although the dream of a National Theatre was not realised until the 1970s and funding in the early years was not large scale, state subsidy brought about a gradual but substantial change in the industry. That is, the Arts Council's subsidy for non-profits and various tax benefits – exemption from Entertainments Tax, income tax reduction, rates reduction and, later, exemption from the Selective Employment Tax – conferred on them eventually led to the formation of non-profit theatre sector. Most non-profit theatres were constituted as 'educational charities'⁷ whose aims were promoting or advancing education or enlightenment through the production or presentation of high-quality plays, dramas and other forms of theatrical arts. Their organisational structure differed from that of commercial theatres. The management of the theatre became a responsibility borne by a Board of Trustees, members of which had limited liability for the organisation. The Board's responsibilities included appointing an artistic director, hiring artistic and administrative staff, making general policy and negotiating with the Arts Council and local authorities whilst the artistic control of a theatre was vested in the artistic director. Although frictions between the board and the artistic director were constantly observed, the new system was consolidated as a basic structure of the theatre in the post-war Britain (Hunt et al., 1978: 145).

Meanwhile, the commercial theatre sector declined mainly due to competition with film and, later, TV. According to Pick (1985: 8), more than 200 commercial repertory theatres closed in the 1950s. Similarly, Elsom (1971) reports that the 150 commercial playhouses outside London were at the brink of sale during the 1950s and, by 1959, the total number of these venues had dropped to thirty. Contrastingly, the size

⁷ Under charity law, voluntary organisations could be set up as a charity when they aim at achieving one of the following charitable purposes: the relief of poverty; the advancement of education; the advancement of religion; and other purposes beneficial to the community in a way recognised as charitable (Kendall and Knapp, 1996: chap. 3).

of the subsidised theatre sector – especially repertory theatres – grew gradually in line with the increase in state subsidy after the mid-1950s. This was followed by the creation of the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1961, the Royal National Theatre (company) in 1963 and the National Theatre (building) in 1976.

The inauguration of government subsidy implied a potential for the theatre's civilising mission to be actualised by concrete policy measures. Unlike the two earlier periods, the civilising discourse – as a philosophical underpinning of state arts policy – entailed a requirement for conscious strategies or plans to widely disseminate the benefits of arts among the population. However, there was a huge gap between such an ideal and the reality of policy-making. As Minihan (1977: xi) rightly points out, the post-war arts policy in Britain was defined by and also suffered from the inherent rupture between two different ideas – the social responsibilities of the arts on one hand and the aesthetic celebration of arts for arts' sake. While civilising claims were used at a rhetorical level, actual policy-making was firmly grounded on the view that the arts should be subsidised because of their aesthetic values and funding decisions should be made according to artistic merits rather than social concerns (Redcliff-Maud, 1976; Wits, 1998: chap. 9). Supporting the arts for non-aesthetic purposes was deemed to instrumentalise them, and even arguing for equal access to the arts was seen as so doing. For example, it is well known that Keynes worried that 'what one may call the welfare side was to be developed at the expense of the artistic side, and standards generally' (Everitt, 2001: 64). At the same time, there still existed a *laissez-faire* approach to the arts, which discredited policy-making itself.

Although often a subject of suspicion, government positioned itself as a mere grant-maker who should not meddle with the arts and adopted the institution of the 'arm's length principle' (Redcliff-Maud, 1976). The Arts Council's allocation of the

grant was made according to its own judgement based on the advice of professional artists working through a system of ‘peer judgement’. As N. V. Linklater, Drama Director (1970-1977) to the Council, recalled, funding decisions were guided by the art form panels, committees of enquiry, working parties and reports on specific issues, which implied that the Council’s funding policy generally grew from and reflected the wishes of ‘the profession itself’ (Sinclair, 1995: Appendix E). This tended to bring forward the policy of subsidy for arts’ sake. Although the Council declared two official objectives, ‘artistic excellence’ and ‘public accessibility’,⁸ its main concern was alleged to be the achievement of the former. In particular, its preference was given to large scale, metropolitan organisations. The Council itself confirmed such an attitude by using horticultural metaphors such as ‘few but roses’ and ‘raise and spread’ (Sinclair, 1995: 88-96).

To sum up, state subsidy based on the civilising discourse played a key role in facilitating the formation of the non-profit theatre sector during the post-war period. Taking the non-profit organisational form, the theatre could present itself as an ‘educational’ and ‘artistic’ endeavour, which was distinguished from popular, commercial entertainment. In a sense, a new breed of theatre with the management structures and operational goals appropriate for pursuing its civilising mission finally developed with state subsidy. However, the government did not have a clear idea of what kind of civilising effects the arts would deliver and, more importantly, how they could be equally distributed among the population. The state’s arts policy was constructed upon two contrasting viewpoints – arts as a civilising agency vs. arts for arts’ sake – and this problem was never fundamentally resolved.

⁸ The Royal Charter of the Arts Council of Great Britain (1946) specified the Council’s goals as follows: (a) to develop a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively; and (b) to increase accessibility to the fine arts to the public (see Sinclair, 1995: Appendix A).

However, the policy-makers and cultural practitioners could avoid any clash between these two by decoupling their actions from direct interpretations of the civilising mission. Here, it might be useful to note Hugoson's (1997) analysis of the rhetoric of abstract goals in cultural policy. According to him, abstract policy goals such as cultural equality can be seen as rhetoric because they cannot be precisely defined and do not give any clear direction to the way they should be interpreted into results. Nevertheless, he argues, the deployment of such rhetoric is 'effective' because it gives an impression that the state cares for the issue whilst allowing the policy itself many different readings. It is in this sense that the civilising mission tended to remain rhetoric or a relatively neglected policy goal while policy-makers were orientated towards goals of artistic excellence and autonomy.

6. Discussion

The genealogy of the civilising discourse of the theatre tells that the discourse was an historical construct and was employed in various contexts. Although the civilising claims served as a rationale for changes newly brought into theatre organisation and the sector, they were not always translated into well-defined management or policy strategies for reaching out to the general public (particularly those on the margins of society), which could be a fundamental base of the theatre's civilising mission. Both the nineteenth-century theatre management and the post-war cultural policy demonstrated an apparent distance from the goal of cultural governance. Similarly, pioneers of the repertory movement appeared to be more concerned with tackling commercialism and enhancing the quality of drama than the issue of public accessibility.

By shedding light on the limitations of civilising claims' sway over theatre management and policy-making, this article challenges the two existing analytical

frameworks, which see the rise of civilising discourse as indicating that culture becomes instrumentalised for social goals or that culture is inherently governmental. While placing culture and governance in opposition, the instrumentality thesis does not recognise the significant role played by the civilising discourse in the process of evolution of the non-profit, high arts. As the history of the theatre shows, the discourse facilitated the series of changes and innovations through which theatre organisations went, such as improvement of their social position, introduction of new norms and conventions, refinement of the stage and development of non-commercialism, state subsidy and promotion of the belief in artistic autonomy and excellence. These can be seen as an important feature of the development of the cultural field, which has its ‘own culture’, such as striving for artistic achievement and seeking autonomy from social, economic or political concerns (Bourdieu, 1993; DiMaggio, 1986, 1991; Scott, 2001). Thus, it could be concluded that ‘civilising’ was not merely something opposing or external to culture (e.g., Belfiore, 2002; Gray, 2007; Mirza, 2006) but was a part of making of ‘culture’ in its modern sense and developing the idea of autonomous arts. Nonetheless, it would be equally problematic to conceptually conflate culture and civilising, as the cultural governance theory tends to (e.g., T. Bennett, 1998, 2001). This theory has widened the scope of cultural policy research by advancing historical perspective, spotting historical parallels with culture’s civilising claims today. However, its identification of culture with governance itself seems questionable as the very history shows as much fissure as interdependency between these two.

In order to understand the complexity and dynamics in the use of civilising claims, this article argues that one needs to deliberate the dialectic interactions between the claims and the actors in the cultural sector. As a belief widely shared by those who were concerned with moral and educating potential of the theatre or the arts in general,

the claims defined participants in civilising projects – this could lead to the formation of a sector or sub-sector – and provided them with values and causes with which they could identify and with a language they could use. The claims also empowered them by legitimising their ventures into new practices and policies, which eventually brought about substantial shift to the theatre organisation and the sector as a whole. However, it should be noted that, although powerful and persuasive, the civilising claims were rhetorical and abstract in Hugoson's sense (1997) and remained to be interpreted and framed by actors in the sector (Ferree, 2008; Ferree and Gamson, 2003). Theatre history demonstrates that the advocates of the claims gave different meanings to the rhetoric of 'civilising' according to their own understanding of the problems and potentials of the theatre at a given time. At all three moments, translations of 'civilising' were closely concerned with challenging existing norms and practices and institutionalising alternatives. In this sense, the translations were seen as strategic and entrepreneurial (DiMaggio, 1986; Garud, Hardy and Maguire, 2007: 962). Importantly, what the advocates preferred was 'arts-centred' translations – such as respectable theatre, anti-commercialism, intelligent drama and audience, or achievement of artistic excellence – rather than straightforward interpretations of the civilising mission, such as equal access to the theatre or the theatre's inclusion of problematic population. This might imply that the actual framing of culture's civilising claims was shaped within the historical context of the formation of the culture in the cultural sector.

Behind the contemporary British cultural policy's redefinition of culture as a solution to social problems is the government's recognition of the limitations of market-driven approaches to social issues and consequently increased attention to cultural factors that affect social and economic life of people (Driver and Martell, 1998). The policy assumes that culture (as arts) can make direct contributions towards

‘enhancing’ culture (as a way of life) of individuals and communities. Subsidised cultural organisations’ provision of outreach and participatory programmes targeting those who are exposed to social problems is at the core of this policy. However, this article pinpoints the importance of arts-centred rules and practices, which have already been institutionalised under the civilising claims, as a context in which cultural organisations and practitioners respond to the new policy environment. From this perspective, one could expect that, rather than simply conforming to the social agenda and taking on new responsibilities prescribed by policy-makers, the organisations and practitioners might resist to the policy (e.g., various visual artists’ statements in Wallinger and Warnock, 2000) or adopt more strategic approaches. They might try to keep their artistic mission untainted while satisfying requirements from the government and public funding bodies by strategically translating culture’s social impacts into their organisational structure and practices (Lee, 2005). Yet, substantial empirical research is to be done. ‘Culture in the cultural sector’ and ‘strategic agencies’ seem to provide an analytical framework for empirical investigation of the nature and limits of socially oriented cultural policy by drawing one’s attention to the possibility that the policy could be resisted, interpreted and mediated.

Meanwhile, historically and socially embedded exclusiveness of culture appears to pose another serious challenge to the cultural policy that assumes culture’s universal and timeless power to civilise. The three moments tell that the exclusiveness tended to be encouraged, ignored or tolerated by management and policy-making in the process of evolution of non-commercial, high arts organisations (also see DiMaggio, 1986, 1991 for the similar process observed in the US). This issue becomes more complicated when one considers the voluntary dimensions of the exclusivity shown by the nineteenth-century experience that significant part of the traditional – working-class

– theatre audience switched to other popular entertainments when they were forced to adapt to reformed, civilised theatre. Recent sociological findings also challenge the idea of culture's universal effects by demonstrating that cultural tastes and preferences are a social construct (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). In this sense, civilising through mainly subsidised high arts seems a policy project which is ambitious but difficult to achieve.

In closing, the findings of the article suggest that the civilising discourse needs further investigation. In particular, one needs to question why the discourse is so persuasive and has never waned over time in spite of the notable distance between its rhetoric and the reality of cultural policy and management. This might be because it mirrors the kernel of the modern idea of culture inherited from the nineteenth century (Arnold, 1993; Borzello, 1987) and perhaps one cannot be fully free from it. It appears so despite the strong presence of theories which argue for the autonomous nature of the cultural field and its institutions and, more recently, post-modern thoughts that seriously challenge the conventional association between high culture and civilising values.

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